DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 403 226 SP 037 083

AUTHOR Oliver, Peter V.; Weinswig, S. Edward
TITLE The Human Scavenger Hunt: A Unique Classroom Ice-Breaker Exercise.
PUB DATE [Nov 96]
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; *Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; *Group Dynamics; Higher Education; Interaction; *Interpersonal Competence

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a classroom exercise used on the first day of class to help students meet each other and to help make them feel comfortable in the class. It also helps improve students' memory and interpersonal skills such as active listening, communication and trust. Originally designed for use by college students, the exercise can easily be adapted for a wide range of student ages. The students are asked to locate people in the room who match items on a list (included in the report). This Human Scavenger Hunt provides an opportunity for students to become acquainted with the professor and with each other and could be a way to enhance the quality of instruction. (Contains 22 references.) (MAH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 403 226

The Human Scavenger Hunt: A Unique Classroom "Ice-Breaker" Exercise

Peter V. Oliver and S. Edward Weinswig

University of Hartford

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

P.O Liver

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Running head: SCAVENGER HUNT

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Human Scavenger Hunt

As professors of education at a small private university in the northeast with a combined 35 years of teaching at the undergraduate and graduate-level, we have heard many students lament that their education has often been an impersonal experience. We hear comments from them such as "professors rarely take the time to get to know us as individuals" and "we often complete an entire semester without getting to know any of our peers in class." These expressions are consistent with empirical research which shows that many students perceive their educational experiences and classroom environments negatively (Chase, 1992; Firestone, 1989; Goodlad, 1984; Engstrom, 1981) and furthermore, that these negative attitudes often worsen with students' age (Berliner & Casanova, 1985). Students often report feeling alienated in their classrooms (Deer, Maxwell, & Relich, 1986) and depersonalized (Powers & Gose, 1986), especially in large lecture-type classes (Benjamin, 1991). Furthermore, some research suggests that this issue is more problematic for female students (Crawford & MacLeod, 1990), although other evidence suggests that women experience more affiliation and involvement in the classroom than do their male counterparts (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989). These negative perceptions by women and men have also been linked to other problems for students such as dropping out of school (Cheng, 1994; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987), absenteeism (Reid, 1983), stress (Kagan & Fasan, 1988; Johns & Johns, 1983), academic achievement (Ames, 1992), and an unwillingness to speak in class (Bowers, 1986).

As a result of students' comments and the apparent problems that may arise because of them, we have developed a classroom exercise called the "Human Scavenger Hunt" that we use on the first day of class. It is used to have students meet each other and to help make them feel comfortable in the class. Other objectives for its use include improving students' memory and interpersonal skills, such as active listening, communication and trust. Furthermore, this exercise can easily be adapted for a wide-range of students' ages, from elementary through higher education.

<u>Developing the Human Scavenger Hunt</u>

Select topics that are both interesting and developmentally appropriate for your students. It is a good idea to create this list several days prior to the first day of class. This will allow you to include topics that are newsworthy (and remove items that are no longer of current interest). Table one includes sample items that we have used successfully in our undergraduate and graduate-level classes.

Directions:

At the beginning of the first day of class, arrange the students' seats in such a way that everyone can see and hear each other clearly (a circle configuration works well, depending on the class size). Then, introduce the exercise with the following directions:

> How many of you don't know many of your classmates here? *(pause)* As educators and students, we tend to feel a lot more comfortable with people if we know at least something about them. We would like to take some time now for people to get to know each other, at least a little bit. To make this easier, we will do the following exercise. Your task is to locate people in the room who match the items on your list. Find one person for each item. Please do not include the names of students you already know. No name may be used more than twice. There is no need to rush, but try to complete as many items as you can.

After a majority of students have completed as much of their lists as possible, have them return to their seats and write the names of as many new students they can now identify in the classroom.

Occasionally, some students may wish to not participate in the exercise. While it is important to respect their request, educators may also want to consider asking these students to serve as observers who will report on their perceptions of their classmates' experiences. In this way, then, even these students are included at some level in the exercise.

Group Process:

As a class, we (students and instructor) then process their experiences based on the exercise. We ask students to identify possible reasons for doing this exercise. The students and

talk about how many students they have met, what was useful about the exercise, how comfortable (or uncomfortable) the exercise was for them, and how they feel about being in the class.

Educational Objectives

Over the years, students have made many positive comments about the exercise, some of which have even appeared on our course evaluations (4 months after the exercise was used!). In general, students report that the exercise helped them feel immediately "at home" by creating an environment that was positive, warm, motivating, and conducive to learning. For instance, according to several students[1] such as Jill, "The exercise made me feel welcome in here. It's different from other classes where you just sit the first day and get talked to." Paul said, "It is important to feel good about being in class. This [exercise] really makes you feel at home." Danielle reported that, "It's nice to not be sitting with bunch of strangers." The exercise also helped students establish positive relationships with their professors and peers. According to Danny, "I've met so many people already, and it's only the first day of class. I was amazed to learn that somebody else in here had the same birthday as mine. If we had not done this exercise, I never would have known this. Thanks!" Rachael said, "When you [the instructor] walked around meeting people just like the rest of us, it made me feel like you are one of us. That was appreciated." For other students, the exercise heightened their awareness of similarities and differences among their peers. For example, Jennifer reported, "I can't believe that no one else here has heard of Mt. Washington." In contrast, Dave had this to say: "I didn't think anybody else had ever heard of that book, let alone actually read it."

Adaptations of the Human Scavenger Hunt:

1. Teaching Tool

This exercise can be used to introduce interpersonal aspects of classroom education. While teaching is not based completely on social interactions, positive student-student relationships facilitate classroom learning (Abrami, Chambers, Poulsen, & Kouros, Farrell, & D'Apollonia, 1994). Likewise, positive teacher-student relationships enhance classroom learning (Funderburk,

---

[1] All names are pseudonyms.

1994). This "hands-on" technique allows students to experience the personal and interpersonal benefits of learning in a positive classroom climate instead of simply being presented with this information in a more traditional lecture format.

2. Different Age-Groups

The Human Scavenger Hunt technique can be used in other educational settings such as elementary schools. Educators simply need to create items that are developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive for their particular student population. For example, Figure Two presents items that may be used with early elementary school children.

Conclusion

Classroom climate influences students' learning and motivation and students learn best when they feel comfortable in their surroundings (Waxman, 1991; Menges & Kulieke, 1984). This is true for elementary and secondary level students (Ames, 1992) through older, non-traditional college students (Khan & Donlevy, 1991). One way to develop comfort is to create a class that is not a gathering of strangers. We offer the Human Scavenger Hunt as an exercise designed to help students get acquainted with the professor and with each other as a means toward enhancing quality of instruction. Whether this exercise actually improves academic performance, however, has not been tested empirically. Nonetheless, these interactions appear to produce, among other things, discovery among peers, heightened awareness of similarities and differences among students as well as nurture students' curiosity to know each other better.

References

Abrami, P. C., Chambers, B., Poulsen, C., & Kouros, C., Farrell, M., & D'Apollonia, S. (1994). Positive social interdependence and classroom climate. Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs, 120(3), 327-346.

Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, structures, and student motivation. Journal of Educational Psychology, 84(3), 261-271.

Beer, C. T., & Darkenwald, G. G. (1989). Gender differences in adult student perceptions of college classroom social environments. Adult Education Quarterly, 40(1), 33-42.

Benjamin, L. T. (1991). Personalization and active learning in the large introductory psychology class. Teaching of Psychology, 18(2), 68-74

Berliner, D., & Casanova, U. (1985). Can we help children stay enthusiastic about school. Instructor, 95(2), 12-13.

Bowers, J. W. (1986). Classroom communication apprehension: A survey. Communication Education, 35(4), 372-378.

Chase, C. (1992). Comparing student, teacher and parent attitudes toward schools. The High School Journal, 75(2), 105-110.

Cheng, Y. C. (1994). Classroom environment and student affective performance: An effective profile. Journal of Experimental Education, 62(3), 221-239.

Crawford, M., & MacLeod, M. (1990). Gender in the college classroom: An assessment of the "chilly climate" for women. Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 23(3-4), 101-122.

Darkenwald, G. G., & Gavin, W. J. (1987). Dropout as a function of discrepancies between expectations and actual experiences of the classroom social environment. Adult Education Quarterly, 37(3), 152-163.

Deer, C. E., Maxwell, T. W., & Relich, J. D. (1986). Student perceptions of school climate over time: Two secondary schools. Australian Journal of Education, 30(2), 188-189.

Engstrom, G. A. (1981). Mexican-American and Anglo-American student perceptions of the learning environment of the classroom: A study of schooling in the United States. Technical

Report Series, No. 22. California University Graduate School of Education, Los Angeles.

Fassinger, P. A. (1995). Understanding classroom interaction: Students' and professors' contributions to the students' silence. Journal of Higher Education, 66(1), 82-96.

Firestone, W. A. (1989). Beyond order and expectations in high schools serving at-risk youth. Educational Leadership, 46(5), 41-45.

Funderburk, M. W. (1994). Classroom climate in teacher education courses: Students' perceptions. College Student Journal, 28(4), 492-499.

Goodlad, J. I. (1984). A place called school: Prospects for the future. New York: McGraw Hill.

Johns, B., & Johns, M. (1983). Stress: It burns out kids, too. Learning, 11(6), 48-49.

Kagan, D. M., & Fasan, V. (1988). Stress and the instructional environment. College Teaching, 36(2),75-81.

Khan, Z., & Donlevy, J. G. (1991). the college classroom and non-traditional students: Employing effective adult learning principles and practices. Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology, 17(1-2), 51-53.

Powers, S., & Gose, K. F. (1986). Reliability and construct validity of the Maslach Burnout Inventory in a sample of university students. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 46(1), 251-255.

Reid, K. (1983). Retrospection and persistent school absenteeism. Educational Research, 25(2), 110-115.

Waxman, H. C. (1991). Investigating classroom and school learning environments: A review of recent literature and developments in the field. Special Issue: Classroom and school learning environments. Journal of Classroom Instruction, 26(2), 1-4.

Figure 1

HUMAN SCAVENGER HUNT

Complete the following list by meeting other students in the room.

You may use no name more than twice. Number 22 is a must.

Find someone who....

1. was born the same month as you. _____
2. has been to Disneyland. _____
3. was not born on the East Coast. _____
4. is wearing contact lenses. _____
5. goes to the shore in the summer. _____
6. has climbed Mount Washington. _____
7. wears the same cologne or perfume as you. _____
8. is from your home state. _____
9. has been to Washington, D.C. _____
10. has pierced ears. _____
11. has read a novel within the last month. _____
12. saw a movie within the last week. _____
13. has brothers and sisters. _____
14. plays tennis. _____
15. likes escargot. _____
16. has never been to Florida. _____
17. has been to Europe. _____
18. ate breakfast today. _____
19. has green eyes. _____
20. got a high-school letter in a sport. _____
21. is disinterested in the Simpson case. _____
22. you would like to know better. _____

Figure 2

Young Person's Scavenger Hunt

Find someone in your class who:

Has a birthday in the same month as you. _____

Has a pet dog or cat. _____

Has two brothers and sisters. _____

Has a pet fish. _____

Likes "Power Rangers." _____

Was born in a different country than you. _____

Speaks a different language than you. _____

Has the same number of letters in their name _____

Read the same book as you recently. _____

Lives on the same block as you. _____

Likes the same Disney Video as you do. _____

Was not born in the United States. _____

Someone whose name begins with "B." _____

Someone whose name ends with "T." _____

Who has recently climbed a tree. _____

You would like to get to know better. _____